

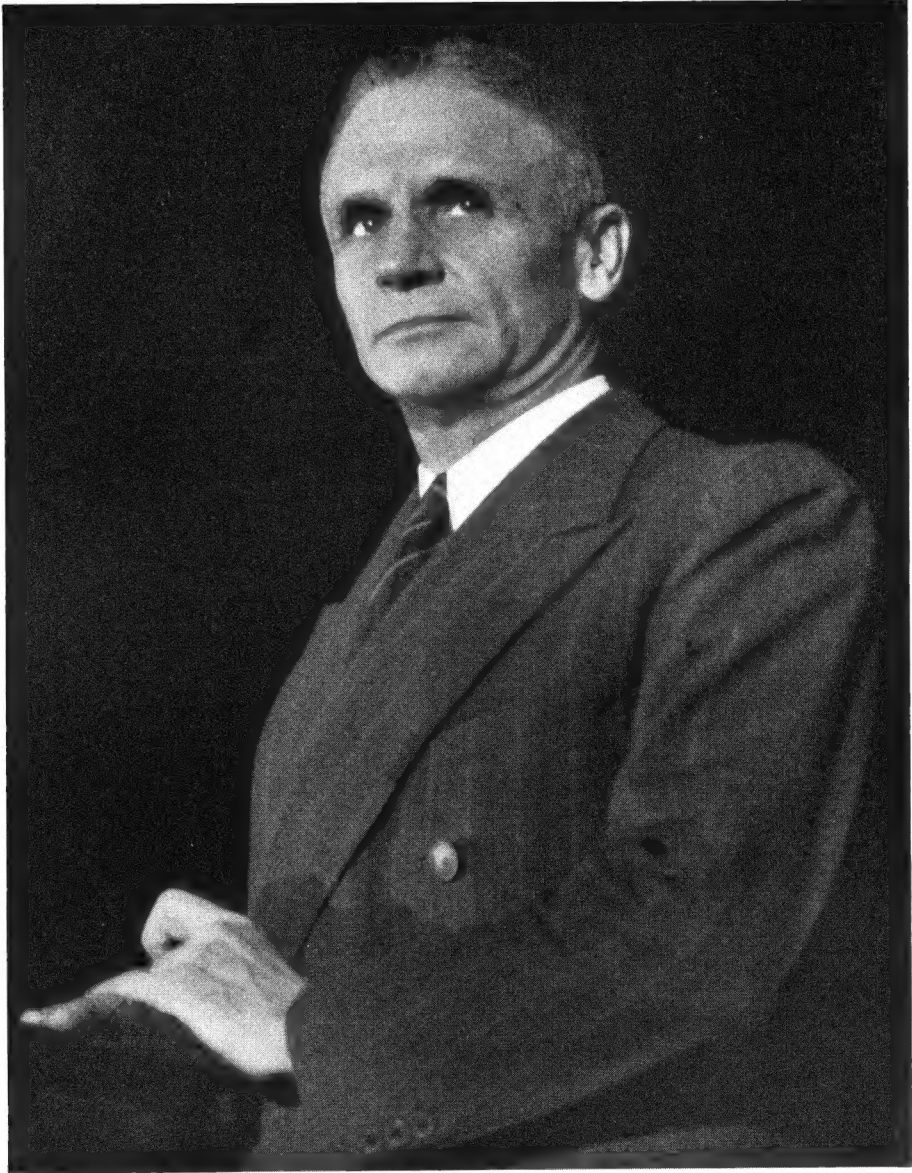
ACCEPTANCE ADDRESS

OF THE

Honourable John Bracken

ON ACCEPTING THE
LEADERSHIP OF THE PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE PARTY
AT WINNIPEG, DECEMBER 11, 1942

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Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

You have paid me a very great honour. It is far beyond my capacity to deserve, but I shall give you all I have of my very modest abilities to try to be worthy of your confidence. I wish to thank Murdo MacPherson, John Diefenbaker, Howard Green and Harry Stevens for this early evidence of team play. That is what is needed in any contest and I trust that we may have many similar evidences of it in the days that lie ahead.

At no time have I felt that my record of public service was sufficiently imposing that a great democratic body such as this should seek me out and offer me the leadership. On the contrary, I believe that a man's ideas and ideals have to stand the test of judgment in open discussion before a traditional form of convention such as this, if they are to carry the judgment of the people in the much wider sphere of the nation.

In considering this whole question of myself in relation to your convention, I think you will agree with me that it would not have been becoming on my part if I had even appeared to seek a nomination for leadership of this party. I had not in the past been one of you, and any effort to intrude myself could have been justly interpreted to be improper.

Having said this, I should like to add that I have followed with interest the events leading up to this convention, and I am in accord with you that there is an urgent need in this country for the development of a sane, progressive body of political thought, the desire of which is to be ready to undertake the difficult task of government if not during the war in the less tragic but equally difficult days of peace that lie ahead.

I shall not attempt at this time to diagnose the economic ills of today nor to prescribe a cure for them. There will be other occasions for that. In any event in these swiftly moving times one man's opinion is of little moment against the surge of the great forces which are moulding in a large degree the world of tomorrow.

There are, I am sure, many points in our present government's conduct of the war upon which you and I as individuals might have different opinions. There are, however, a few fundamental issues upon which we could meet on common ground. If I have had any achievements to my credit in my record of public service, I would say that these have been accomplished in co-operation with other men. There is no one individual in our democratic system today who can fill the prophetic role of a Moses, no matter what his talents or the degree of the industry

he brings to the task. On the contrary, I am confident that a group of men, working for a common aim, drawing upon the accumulated wisdom about us, can by co-operation achieve great things, certainly in a nation as young and progressive as ours. Therefore, rather than impose my personal views on any economic or social reforms, I would prefer to leave the thought with you that I, in co-operation with many of you, might sit down and refine to a working basis many of the admirable viewpoints which have been incorporated in the programme upon which you have been working so industriously for the past few days. Whatever the platform adopted here may be, — and I have not had opportunity to examine it in detail — no matter how forward looking, it will have to be amenable to changing times. These are days that do not require hasty judgment, but are a challenge for every man to use of the wisdom he possesses in working out the much talked of world of tomorrow.

Nor shall I discuss the many good or bad points in our present government's conduct of the war. I shall content myself with saying, with all the force at my command, that I deprecate, as I am sure you all do, the departure from parliamentary procedure which has taken place during the past three years at Ottawa. We are all conscious that in order to meet some of the emergencies of war we must for the time being incorporate within the procedure of democracy some of the arbitrary methods of dictatorship; but any unnecessary contempt or disregard of parliament as an institution ought to give concern to every Canadian who gives thought to public questions. The fact is that the very institutions our young men are fighting to defend are being stultified before our eyes. To some degree that may be necessary, but it is the duty of every Canadian to see that the supremacy of parliament is not denied and that it be re-established and protected at the earliest possible time.

It is needless to tell this gathering that after these tragic days of war are over I believe that Canada, as a vigorous member of the British Commonwealth of Nations, geographically located so as to bring about the close co-operation with a great nation, the United States of America, and supported by untouched natural resources, has one of the brightest futures of any country in the world.

Comment has been made in your platform about the British connection. In this respect I recall that a prominent Canadian once said, "A British subject I was born, a British subject I will die." Sir John A. Macdonald made that statement, if I remember correctly, in the year of his death — half a century before that small out-numbered band of intrepid airmen over Britain gave civilization another chance to save itself. If Sir John A. could say that more than 50 years ago, I am sure there are few among us today, after the battle of Britain and after all that has taken place in the last three years, — few who will not take pride in the maintenance of British institutions and in standing side by side with the other members of the Commonwealth of British nations and with the great American nation to the south of us, in facing whatever problems the future may have in store for us.

The mention of the name of Sir John A. Macdonald recalls to me one of the earliest memories of my childhood days in Ontario. I think it was in the year 1891. I recall very distinctly when the news came of the great statesman's death. A wave of sadness swept over the

community, and I remember distinctly in our humble farm home my father dressing himself up in his Sunday clothes and going with many of his neighbors to the then distant city, now only twenty miles away, the City of Kingston, to attend his funeral.

Speaking for myself, I want to help work out such a programme for the future as will give to the youth of this country, as well as to the middle aged and the old of every race and creed and economic group, ample justification for a militant faith in it.

I want team play in doing it, team play from the grand fellows who contested this nomination with me, team play from the officers of this organization and from the rank and file of the Canadian people, and team play from the best specialized brains of this country upon which we must draw, if, from out of the complicated structure of our economy, we are to arrive at wise rational policies that will be best for the general good.

I want to help build a united Canada. I want to try to help get Canada back to the unity Macdonald and Cartier gave it in the beginning and that Laurier so well maintained. I want to try to arrest the trend towards separatism so dangerous to Confederation. It is not in the interest of any section of Canada that any existing misunderstandings should continue.

While I believe that if our democracy is to survive it can only survive on the basis of the acceptance of democratic decisions — yet I believe also that in a country so filled with minorities as Canada, that the basic rights of minorities must be fully guarded. On basic fundamental matters majorities must have the right of decision, but within that right there must be a place for tolerance and justice without which the accomplishment of unity is impossible. I believe in the spirit of Cartier when he said we should speak “in the language of reason, truth and justice.” I believe also with Laurier when he said, “I speak my whole soul and heart when I say that if Germany were to win I would be thankful that Providence should close my eyes before I saw the sun rising on such a day.”

Reference has been made in recent days to some “14 points” which I outlined in what in a recent address I referred to as the “People’s Charter.” I may say to this audience that the address I gave on that occasion was an address on “War Clouds and New Horizons.” The reporters who listened to it featured only the objectives which I outlined in the latter part of the address.

In the earlier part of that address, in dealing with the war situation, I enlarged upon four points, namely:

- (1) The great necessity for the most effective prosecution of this war to final victory;
- (2) The necessity for an enduring peace after it is over;
- (3) The necessity for making plans now to prevent unemployment and depression after the war or to meet these problems by, among other things, providing jobs instead of the dole and by maintaining the national income if either unemployment or depression should threaten; and

- (4) The necessity of rebuilding in Canada a spirit of national unity based upon better understanding and a more frank approach to all the more important problems upon which there are or may be evidences of disunity.

What I think we need in Canada is a rational long-time programme, national in scope, progressive in character and in every degree worthy of the sacrifice this generation of young men is making in order that democracy may be given another chance to save itself. Let us, therefore, build a society worthy of their sacrifice, a society that will be the best monument we at home can build to their memory.

The "People's Charter"*

As for myself, to the extent that I may have anything to do with the direction of Canadian policy my actions shall be guided by a recognition of the following rights:

- (1) The right of every man to have a job.

What does that mean?

Time will not permit me to enlarge on these points. I might say, however, that among other things this one means that when our soldiers come back from war and take off their uniforms they will not come back to idleness but to jobs. It means also that for those employed in the war industries it must be the business of government to find work for them with no unnecessary delay. It means, too, that in periods of depression the spectacle of mass unemployment must never again be permitted.

- (2) The right of every worker to a fair day's pay for a fair day's work.

That means the right to collective bargaining if desired, and compulsory if necessary, in line with the spirit of the platform endorsed at this convention.

- (3) The right of every individual to be rewarded not on the basis of equal pay for all, but on a basis which recognizes the value of the service given.

- (4) The right of farmers and other primary producers to a fair share of the nation's income.

Nearly one-third of Canada's population, that engaged directly or indirectly in agriculture, has seldom in past years had a fair share of the nation's income; and during the last decade farm income fell to such a low average as to become of very great concern in our Canadian economy. It is the responsibility of the nation to see that this great inequity shall not be perpetuated. I may say quite frankly that if it had not been for that plank in your platform which provides for a square deal being given to agriculture, I would not be here this afternoon.

* Premier Bracken in the address referred to traced briefly the growth of responsible government, mentioning the Great Charter, the Petition of Right, and the Bill of Rights. He also referred to the Atlantic Charter, and suggested that to these historic documents might be added a "People's Charter."

(5) The right of both public and private enterprise to a fair day's work for a fair day's pay.

(6) The right of private enterprise to a fair return on the investment it risks in providing employment.

Nine jobs out of ten in this country are provided by private enterprise. If we are to have full employment, which is the ideal for prosperity, it is essential that enterprise will not be discouraged to the point where it does not provide maximum employment. While exploitation must be prevented, yet conditions must be such as to permit enterprise to function fully, otherwise the duty of providing work will fall upon the State, which brings with it undesirable paternalism and bureaucracy.

(7) The right of every child and youth to equal opportunity to the maximum education suited to its capacity that the State can provide.

(8) The right of every citizen to security against loss of income arising from accident, sickness, loss of employment, old age or other disability.

The degree to which education and social services may be provided for the people is largely determined by the size of the national income. It must be our aim to maintain that income at a high level since to the extent that this is possible a higher degree of educational and social service may be given.

(9) The right of depressed provinces to a rationalization of Dominion-Provincial financial relations.

(10) The right of the public to expect efficient administration of the funds it entrusts to the management of the State.

Our Federal Government is this year spending some 4,000 million dollars of the people's money. That is a very large sum. It is more than twice as much as was spent in more than four years of the last war. Nearly half of it is taken from the pockets of the people in taxes. The taxes alone take between one-quarter and one-third, on the average, of everyone's income. The prudent administration of such huge sums is one of the major responsibilities of government.

(11) A recognition by the public of the right of the State to exact by a fair system of taxation the funds necessary to meet the services required of the State.

(12) The right of future generations to a world of plenty.

A world of plenty is within our grasp providing we can bring to the arts of peace two modern servants of the human race which for generations past have been prostituted to the art of war. I refer to applied science and mechanization. As I have already said, this war is costing us 4,000 million dollars this year, which is seven times as much as it cost to run the Government before the war; and it is more than four times as much as was spent on unemployment relief — both work projects and direct relief — during the eleven long years following 1930.

As an indication of what applied science can accomplish for us let me remind you that had it not been for the scientific research done at the Universities of Manitoba and Minnesota and other research Institutions during the last twenty years, (on a fungus disease known as wheat rust) the wheat crop of Canada this year would in all probability have

been not 550 million bushels as it was, but probably not more than half that figure.

The door to a world of plenty is waiting to be opened. To this generation of men has been given the opportunity to open it. You and I have today accepted the challenge to do our part to reach this great objective, which up to now has evaded the wit of man to grasp.

(13) The right of future generations to a world of peace.

(14) The right of the people to expect from their leaders a determined effort to disencumber society from the barriers to world trade, world progress and world peace; and the right of these leaders to expect from the public something more than passive support in getting them removed.

I think it was Hitler who said: "If goods do not go across international boundaries, armies will." After the last war, in the economic wars that followed, we sowed the seeds of the war we have today. One of the great lessons arising out of the aftermath of that war, and the one we must not forget after this war, is that as far as may be practicable, those barriers to trade must be lowered. That is the spirit of the Atlantic Charter.

In leaving the post I have held for so long, I am happy to say that the responsibilities of government in this Province will be left in capable hands. The business affairs of the Province are in good condition. The Cabinet is comprised of capable and industrious men of unimpeachable integrity; and I think it is safe to say that no section of the public feels that it has been unrepresented in the Councils of the Province. As a result, there has been a spirit of unity such as it has been given few provinces of such diverse parts to experience. If in these years a modest contribution to rational government has been made, it is due, not to one man's efforts, but to the most wholehearted team play and co-operation on the part of every man in the Government, and in whatever group or groups supported it in the Legislature. A leader of the Government will be chosen by democratic process in due course, and his name will be recommended by me to the Lieutenant-Governor as my successor.

In closing these remarks let me say that no one will ever know what the decision to leave Manitoba has meant to me. For upwards of twenty years I have enjoyed the most loyal and unswerving support ever given to a public man by all those with whom I have been associated in the Cabinet and in the Legislature. I could never have left such associations had it not appeared that some of the major things for which we have stood, I might help to achieve in a larger field. If in the years to come I can be worthy of the same loyal support from this group, as has been given to me by my associates of the past, I have no doubt but that we shall together be able to make some contribution to Canada.

As I said at the beginning, you have done me a very great honour. I shall do my best to deserve your confidence.